AUSTRIAN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Improved WASH systems and Resilience in Amhara (IWRA)

Inception Report

Reporting Period: 1.12.2021 – 30.06.2022

List of Abbreviations

Austrian Development Agency	ADA
Austrian Development Cooperation	ADC
Behaviour Change Communication	BCC
Child Marriage	CM
Disaster Risk Reduction	DRR
Female Genital Mutilation	FGM
Focus Group Discussions	FGDs
Female-headed Households	FHH
Government Offices	GOs
Harmful Traditional Practices	HTPs
Health Extension Workers	HEW
Health Post	HP
Household	HH
Income-Generating Activity	IGA
Key Informant Interviews	KIIs
Male-headed Households	MHH
Menstruation Hygiene Management	MHM
Neglected Tropical Disease	NTD
Non-Governmental Organizations	NGOs
Open Defecation Free	ODF
Partner Capacity Assessment	PCA
Program Steering Committee	PSC
Social Analysis and Action	SAA
Water Sanitation and Hygiene	WASH

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1. Introduction

CARE Ethiopia is implementing the two years' project entitled **'IWRA – improved WASH systems and Resilience in Amhara'** in East and West Belesa woredas of Central Gonder Zone, Amhara Regional State. Enabled by the financial support of the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), the operational unit of the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC), and through CARE Austria, the project's objective is to improve the food security and resiliency of chronically food-insecure households in East and West Belesa woredas. The project takes place in 28 kebeles - 20 of the kebeles were already targeted during the SWEEP project, 8 are new kebeles.

This report summarizes the status of the IWRA project activities accomplished from December 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022.

Among the accomplished preparation activities are the following:

- The MoU was prepared and signed;
- The project familiarization workshop was conducted at regional and woreda-levels;
- Regional and woreda-level steering committees were re-established;
- The required project staff and interns were recruited;
- Intervention kebeles and sites were identified;
- The status of the existing VSLA and SAA groups was assessed;
- The baseline survey was conducted;
- Basic skills on hygiene and sanitation were taught at selected schools;
- A regional-level water governance consultative meeting was conducted;
- 3 water supply schemes were upgraded to solar driven units for the benefit of 35,547 people living in East and West Belesa;
- Trained kebele-level health development army, kebele leaders and health extension workers raised awareness on WASH NTD among community;
- School WASH clubs and MHM clubs were established in 10 selected schools.

Although many activities were implemented, there were challenges during this initial period, including the increase in wages of skilled laborers and the price inflation of industrial construction materials, the difficulty to receive supply offers within an appropriate price range and in a documented, official manner (including payment receipts). For example, although the project bought cement from factories with the support of the regional government and provided an advance payment, the cement's supply is delayed by three months already.

2. Analysis of project status

Project Context and Environment

Ethiopia has made important development gains over the past two decades, reducing poverty and expanding investments in basic social services. However, frequent droughts and land degradation negatively affected the livelihoods of smallholding farmers who account for 84% of the country's population. As a result, many parts of the country are identified as food insecure, with more than 15 million people currently relying on food support, and 42 million people lacking potable water for drinking and productive use. Moreover, certain persisting cultural norms and harmful traditional practices for women and girls continue to act as social barriers to achieving gender equality in the country. The inception period demonstrated that all these challenges are present in East and West Belesa woreda. The Theory of Change (ToC), defined at the beginning of the IWRA project, is based on the final evaluation results of the previously implemented project in the area (SWEEP). The ToC focuses on three different impact areas: (1) improved, inclusive and equitable WASH systems and water resource management for domestic consumption and productive uses; (2) marginalized groups have greater resilience to shocks and stresses, are empowered to have a greater voice in household and community affairs and discriminatory social norms are challenged; and (3) local governments are capacitated, the community empowered and private sector actors strengthened to lead community development and support environmental protection measures. After this inception phase we believe this ToC still holds – the findings of different assessments will enable us to adapt some of the project interventions, to make sure we address some of the biggest challenges identified.

3. Major Activities accomplished

3.1. Project initiation and preparation works

3.1.1. Recruitment

All but one (Capacity Building Officer) of the required project full-time and part-time staff have been recruited and located in the project site. A total of 8 (6 technical staff members and 2 drivers) staff members work in both woredas. The Project Officers (2), each assigned to one woreda, are based in the capital town of each operational woreda (1 -Guhala and 1-Arbay). The Project Manager (1), Gender and Social Accountability Specialist (1), Water Resource Advisor (1), Hygiene and Sanitation Specialist (1), Drivers (2), and administrative staff are based in Debre tabor (CARE Ethiopia's northern program offices), provide technical support and oversee the administrative and overall coordination of the project implementation in both intervention areas. The Program Coordinator (1), Program Manager (1), WASH-Learning, Design, and Measurement Manager (1), WASH-Gender and Economic Transformation Advisor (1), and other administrative staff are based at CARE Ethiopia's Head Office and provide all the required technical and administrative support by conducting quarterly field monitoring

visits, among other activities. A total of 6 female graduates were recruited as interns and are based at the project implementation woredas (3 interns in Guhala and 3 interns in Arbaya).

CARE is in the process of filling the vacant position of Capacity Building Officer by modifying the job description to Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist which is expected to cover the role of capacity building officer, too. The position will help to fill the gap in data management, to improve timely reporting of activities, and to support assessment works planned to be conducted by the government and the field team.

3.1.2. Procurement

The planned and required materials, supplies, and services were procured in compliance with ADC's and CARE Ethiopia's procurement procedures and policy. The procured supplies include water filtration kits, solar pumps, Afridev hand pumps, cement, and other materials. Moreover, a baseline survey was conducted by a consulting firm and meeting halls were hired for different meetings.

CARE Ethiopia uses a list of different selected vendors, whose contact details are stored in CARE's database after conducting a series of assessments, which are updated yearly and/or could be changed at any time, if necessary for the organization's benefit. The solar pumps (three solar pumps for three sites), and Afridev handpumps (25) were purchased by circulating the request for offers in the newspaper for the public invitation. All procurement processes were conducted in accordance with ADC's procurement policy, procedures and guidelines.

CARE faced challenges in procuring materials, supplies, services, and skilled and unskilled labor, due to price inflation. The unavailability of materials and the lack of legal suppliers at the local market were an additional challenge to deliver some interventions within the planned timeframe. The inflation impacts transportation, food, and accommodation prices and are the main reason for the increase in skilled and unskilled labor price. Data from the Central Statistics Agency of Ethiopia (CSA) shows the annual inflation rate on food items climbed to 43.9% in May 2022.

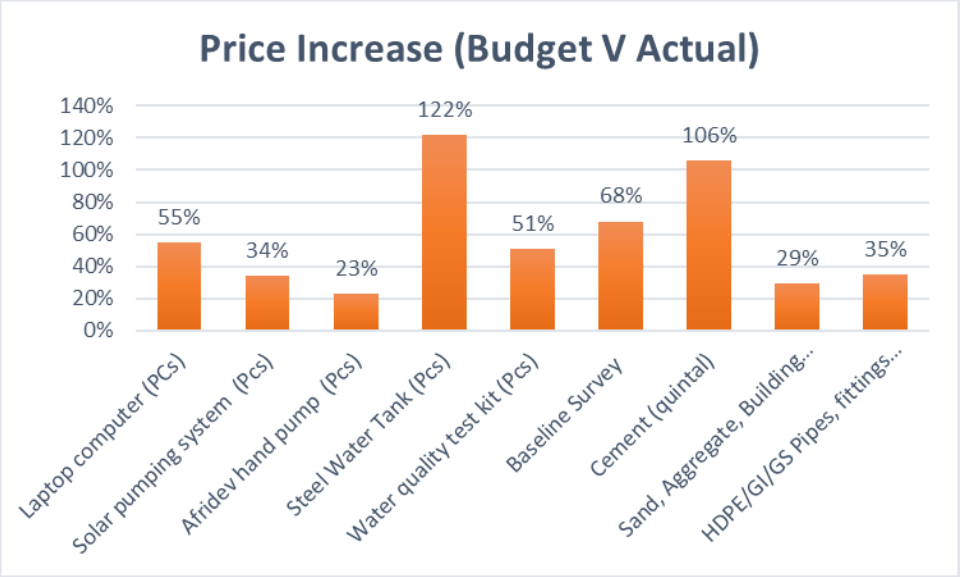

Chart: Budget vs. Actual cost comparisons (Source: Pre-forma & SBAs)

In past years, the gap between the budget and the actual cost could be bridged with currency exchanges, but as the euro value has currently weakened, it was not possible to compensate or narrow the price difference. Given the current increase in market prices, it will be difficult to complete all planned activities with the previously planned budget. We will continue our analysis and prepare a budget amendment request.

3.1.3. MoU with the Amhara Regional Government's relevant sector Bureaus

After the project agreement was signed between CARE Ethiopia and CARE Austria, CARE Ethiopia prepared the memorandum of understanding, for it to be signed between CARE Ethiopia and the concerned government sector bureaus. The Regional Finance and Economic Bureau is the responsible body of the government for coordination and facilitation of the MoU between the sector Bureau and CARE Ethiopia. The MoU was signed by the Regional Water and Energy Bureau, the Regional Finance and Economic Bureau, the Regional Comparative Agency, the Regional Women Affairs and Youth Bureau, the Regional Health Bureau, the Regional Education Bureau, and the Regional Food Security and Disaster Prevention Commission. The signed document was shared with the respective Central Gondar zone department and East and West Woreda sector offices accordingly.

3.1.4. Project launching workshop

CARE Ethiopia and the regional Finance and Economic Bureau conducted a one-day project launching workshop in Bahir Dar for the partners on March 1, 2022. The workshop was attended by regional sector bureau representatives, zone-level Department Heads, Woreda Steering and Technical Committee members, ADA officials, CARE Ethiopia Head Office staff, and project-level staff. The workshop presented the performance of the preceding SWEEP project and IWRA's objectives, strategies, activities, and allocated budget. A total of 68 people (12 of them women) participated.

A similar launching workshop was conducted at the woreda level with the kebele-level partners after the selection of the intervention kebeles on April 13, 2022, at Guhala and on April 14, 2022, at Arbaya Town. A total of 217 people (80 of them women) participated across the 28 intervention kebeles. SWEEP project's strongest achievements and drawbacks, the IWRA project's objective, expected outcomes, planned outputs, and detailed activities were presented and discussed among the participants.

Figure 1: Regional-level project launching workshop; the discussion led by CARE Ethiopia, Bureau of Water and Energy, and Bureau of Finance and Economics (left to right)

3.1.5. Re-initiating the Project Steering Committees in both woredas, zone, and region levels

Based on the previous experience of the SWEEP project, CARE Ethiopia and the regional government jointly re-initiated the regional, zonal, and woreda-level Steering Committees that will facilitate and coordinate the implementation of the project in the intervention areas. Steering Committee members were selected among the signatory bureaus, zone departments, and woreda offices.

At the regional level, Steering Committee participants are the bureau heads, at the zone level they are the department heads, and at the woreda level the heads of offices. The Steering Committee members work in the following sectors: Finance and Economic Cooperation; Food Security; Agriculture; Water, and Energy; Women, Children and Social Affairs; Cooperative Agency; Small and Micro Enterprise/TVET; Education; and Health. CARE Ethiopia staff members are also part of the Steering Committees. TORs for the steering committee were prepared and shared with the stakeholders. Additionally, a woreda-level Technical Committee was set up with technical staff from government offices who will be actively engaged in the project implementation.

The Steering Committee members and community representatives identified the intervention kebeles for the project. The new eight kebeles were selected based on their water coverage, availability of infrastructures like schools, WASH systems, and their adjacent location to the previously targeted kebeles.

3.2. Summary of Progress of Project activities

Output 1.1 Improved access to and sustainable management of sanitation and water resources for domestic consumption and productive use

Activity cluster 1.1.1 SWEEP consolidation work

Activity 1.1.1.2 Conduct assessment to draw up a strategy for how the Government can support WASH, irrigation, and watershed committees in the long term

A regional level one-day workshop was conducted on April 8, 2022. The objective of the workshop was to identify challenges to the sustainability of water supply systems, irrigation systems, and natural resources conservation works. A total of 29 government staff (2 of them women) attended the workshop. Participants flagged challenges to the sustainability of infrastructures, among them poor implementation of water governance policies, strategies, and guidelines; lack of appropriate water governance training for the established WASH Committees (WASHCOs); resource constraints; absence of WASH structures at the kebele level; and lack of attention to WASHCo legalization. Following the workshop, the regional government agreed to design a system to support the legalization of WASHCOs, irrigation committees, and NRM committees through capacity building activities.

Figure 2: Regional-level water governance consultative workshop on April 8, 2022

Activity 1.1.1.5 Institutional arrangement support for 12 Watersheds

The project assessed what support the 12 existing watersheds will need. Based on the assessment, the watershed committee members listed the offices that can be used for storing hand tools and identified a meeting hall for the committee's discussions. IWRA successfully supported the government to legalize four watershed committees. The project also provided logistical and technical support to 12 watersheds during their plantation activities, including information on selection of variety of seedlings, how and where to plant the seedlings, and scheduling of the plantation; as well as support for the transportation of seedlings to the sites.


Figure 3: Watershed committee discussion; logistical support for plantations

Activity 1.1.1.6 Support for HDW/SSD rehabilitation)

The rehabilitation of nonfunctional water schemes is one of the major project activities to ensure the sustainability of access to safe water for the community. A total of 80 nonfunctional water schemes were identified. The extent of the damage and the demand for spare parts were identified for 60 nonfunctional water schemes located in SWEEP intervention kebeles. While the necessary spare parts were procured, it was not possible to distribute them due to the current heavy rainy season.

Activity 1.1.1.8 Expansion support for existing Solar systems

Three existing water supply sites were identified for the expansion of the existing solar systems: Addis Alem and Arbaya water supply systems from West Belesa and Arba Tsigura water supply from East Belesa. The extent of the materials required for expansion were identified and the expansion works will be carried out in the coming quarter depending on the weather conditions of both woredas, since June – September is the rainy season in the northern parts of Ethiopia.

Activity cluster 1.1.2 New Intervention Kebeles

Activity 1.1.2.2 WASH site assessment, feasibility study and design works

To identify new water scheme sites for construction and existing schemes for rehabilitation and upgrading, CARE Ethiopia project staff members and the woredas' Water and Energy Office Experts conducted sites assessments, a feasibility study and designed plans for 18 new water schemes, 20 rehabilitations and 3 expansions of existing water schemes to upgrade them to a system running on solar energy. Moreover, 20 new WASHCos were established to manage the new water schemes, and 18 existing WASHCos were strengthened. The community agreed to supply local materials for the construction of new schemes and the rehabilitation of the existing ones. For the upgraded schemes, detailed designs were made for the solar systems and the required materials and administrative documentation prepared for the procurement process.

Activity 1.1.2.3 Upgrading/construction of new water system with solar driving unit

To increase access to water for domestic use, IWRA upgraded 3 (1 in East and 2 in West Belesa) water supply systems to solar-driven units. The plan for this year was to install one solar-driven system, but due to increasing prices the project team decided to procure all 3 solar systems (solar panels, pumps and other components) this year. As a result, 35,447 people living in East and West Belesa woredas now have continuous access to water.

Figure 4: Community fetching water from solarized water schemes in Guhala; and pump testing after the installation of solar-powered water schemes

a) Guhala Town Solar Hybrid Water Supply Scheme

The Guhala water supply was constructed by the government to serve 23,340 communities living in Guhala town. Previously, the Guhala Town borehole and booster station relied on power from a grid substation 190 kilometres away from this location, which resulted in continuous power breakage and frequency drops, that burnt out the 4 submersible pumps.

The IWRA project connected both the borehole and the booster station to a solar system with a generator using a change-over switch operating systems to sustainably provide water, improving the living condition of the community, and the service provision of health facilities, hotels, and others.

Moreover, the provision of the solar-driven units will minimize the repeated replacement of submersible pumps, as well as the costs for fuel and maintenance significantly, which saves money, time and labor for the town administration and the community.

Figure 5: Installed solar panels (Guhala water supply scheme)

b) Kalay Solar Hybrid Water Supply Scheme

Previously, the scheme was constructed by the government and was operated using diesel. But as the community was unable to cover the cost of diesel, the scheme did not function more than 5 months following its installation.

After the installation of a solar-powered unit through the IRWA project, the scheme is now working, with the government and the community satisfied with the service and praising the project for solving this challenge.

c) Baja Ferfer Solar Hybrid Water Supply Scheme

The rural kebele Bajar Ferfer is located in West Belesa 35 kilometres away from the woreda's main town Arbaya. Like the scheme in Kalay, this scheme was constructed by the government and was not functioning due to the lack of fuel in the locality.

Figure 6: Installed solar panels (Baja Ferfer water supply scheme)

1.1.2.6 Material support for school WASH and MHH clubs

To improve access to WASH facilities and to establish menstruation hygiene management facilities in schools, the project staff and the woreda health and education offices conducted joint visits to assess the gaps in WASH and Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) facilities in 10 public schools. Based on the assessment results, 6 public schools without a water supply system and 5 public schools without latrine facilities were identified.

To bridge these gaps, the project and the school community established 10 MHM clubs. A total of 599 girls in 10 schools registered to become MHM club members. The assessment revealed that the clubs will need basic training on MHM, material support for the existing MHM facilities, and key messages for the promotion of hygiene and sanitation in schools will need to be developed.

Activity 1.1.2.7 Institutional arrangement support for 4 Watersheds

The IWRA project supported a total of 4 watershed committees in two woredas. The community and the government assessed the physical and biological properties of the soil and coordinated the water conservation activities (plantation of seedlings). Moreover, the project staff and the woreda agricultural office staff supported the groups with their legalization process, and 2 groups have gained legal status already. Next quarter, trainings will be provided to the committees and the project will assess how it can support the groups with the construction of offices.

Activity 1.1.2.9 CLTSH ToT training for health staff (woreda and Kebele)

To improve the knowledge and skills of woreda healthcare staff on Community Led Total Sanitation and Hygiene tools (CLTSH), the project (with support of the regional health bureau) conducted a five-days training for 45 (15 of them women) woreda healthcare personnel from May 27 to May 31, 2022. The objective of the training was to i) refresh healthcare experts on CLTSH facilitation skills, ii) to design a community hygiene and sanitation implementation plan, iii) to explain the certification process to declare kebeles Open-Defecation Free (ODF) according to the national guidelines, and iv) to have a common understanding on the implementation process of community hygiene and sanitation activities (WASH-NTD, municipal solid waste management practices). Experts presented their experience with the implementation of CLTSH tools at the community level and the trainers presented the standard application of tools to the participants.

After the training, government staff started processes to declare kelebes ODF. To date, 123 households prepared the construction of improved latrines in their compound. The municipality raised awareness on standards for hygiene and sanitation among 570 community members living in Arbaya (250) and Guhala town (320) through local media large community meetings. Two of the woredas' capital towns established sanitation committees with 75 members. The established committee members conducted sanitary campaign events in both towns, with a total of 595 residents in Guhala town and 250 residents in Arbaya town , respectively. Additionally, the community living in Arbaya and Guhahla towns started to manage the disposal of their solid waste.

Figure 7: Community in sanitary campaign events

Activity 1.1.2.10 WASH NTD orientation for Kebele representatives (HDAs, Kebele leaders, religious leaders)

Due to the high prevalence of WASH NTDs in East and West Belesa, the project plans to integrate the implementation of CLTSH with Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) interventions. A one-day WASH-NTD awareness training was provided to 234 (181 women) health development armies and community leaders on June 12, 2022, in West Belesa district. The orientation focused on the prevention and control methods of common WASH-related NTDs and activities that can be done to reduce disease transmission at the grassroots level. Following this orientation session, the health development armies and community leaders, along with the technical support of health extension workers, provided WASH-NTD awareness-raising orientation sessions to 943 community members.

Activity 1.1.2.12 IEC/BCC material production

To enable the schools to play an active role in achieving a WASH-friendly environment, and to protect and sustain the community's health, the project (in cooperation with the woreda education and health office) developed information, educational, and communication (IEC) material to be distributed in the schools' compound. The materials include information on WASH, COVID-19 and menstrual health and hygiene (MHH). The IEC/BCC material will empower not only the teachers and children frequenting the school, but also the adjacent community, to pro-actively make decisions, modify behaviors and change social norms around hygiene and sanitation. Additionally, Behavior Change Communication (BCC) materials were developed and distributed to schools to use for interactive communication on an individual basis, within groups or communities to promote positive, healthy behavior.

Figure 8: one of IEC/BCC Materials printed in the local language; a model village sample at the school-level (Arbay primary schools)

Activity 1.1.2.13 School WASH and MHH club training

Ten schools from both woredas were selected for school-based WASH implementation. The project provided these schools with a three-days WASH and MHH training for 53 (32 women) school members from April 15-17, 2022. The training focuses on school-based WASH service management, prevention and control of WASH-related diseases like NTDs, girls' menstrual hygiene management and the proper handling and utilization of school WASH facilities. The participants also discussed how to create a WASH-friendly school environment, equip school WASH club leaders with basic WASH training facilitation skills and improve the practical skills of MHM club leaders in the preparation of reusable sanitary pads. Furthermore, an action plan was developed to cascade these messages to the wider community.

In each school, WASH clubs and girls' clubs were established, with 1,222 and 599 members, respectively. Out of the school WASH club members, 611 school health ambassadors were selected with the responsibility to support the school hygiene and sanitation activities, including internal and external sanitation improvement in schools and raising their colleagues' awareness on hygiene and sanitation. The school's health ambassadors provided WASH NTD awareness-raising sessions to 7,161 pupils and teachers, installed 58 solid waste bins, 5 hand washing stations. Moreover, 363 students constructed a household latrine in their home and 2 schools prepared model health villages in their compound. The established girls' clubs prepared and started to use the MHM counseling rooms in 9 schools and provided counseling services to 619 girls. Additionally, the trained MHH club leaders provided awareness-raising sessions to 912 parents on proper MHH management and the prevention of MHH-related infections.

Figure 9: A school community training on basic skills in hygiene and sanitation

Activity 1.1.2.16 Inclusive VIPL construction at schools and public place

The project plans to construct 14 Ventilated Improved Pit Latrine (VIPLs) to improve the institutional and public sanitation services. The excavation and mobilization of local material for 4 public schools was already completed and another 5 schools were identified. 5 public latrine sites were identified and we are currently in the bidding process.

Output 2.1 - Increased capacity of marginalized groups to engage in income generating activities

Activity cluster 2.1.1 SWEEP consolidation works

Activity 2.1.1.1 Conduct assessment of VSLA and SAA groups and provide follow up training and support to strengthen sustainability of these groups, including market and micro-finance linkage work, and legalization of VSLAs

The project in collaboration with the woredas' government staff members conducted an assessment of the functionality of the existing SAA groups, established by the SWEEP project. Based on the assessment results, all 30 SAA were still active. During the interviews the SAA members recommended the project to develop a new discussion manual rather than continuing the discussion with the existing manual. The project will develop a new manual based on the identified norms from the baseline survey.

Several VSLA groups were established by CARE in cooperation with interested community members to improve their saving culture and facilitate access to loans/credits for the members to engage in income generating activities. However, the established VSLA groups do not have legal ground, and as a result the woreda-level government office asked them to join RUSACCOs[1]. However, VSLA members do not want to join RUSACCOs, partly because they are mainly led by men. To solve this issue, the regional cooperative agency and the women affairs bureau discussed possible solutions that would respect the interest of the community to be independent and have legal ground. Together with CARE Ethiopia, they then developed a TOR

[1] Rural Communities of Ethiopia Rural Savings and Credit Cooperatives

and plan to conduct assessments that will identify potentials for market linkages and how VSLA groups can gain legal status, without having to join a RUSACCO. The assessment will be conducted next quarter.

Activity 2.1.1.2 Provide one day refresher training to existing VSLA group members

The project provided a five-days TOT training from May 27-31, 2022, for 40 (13 women) project staff members, and woreda and zone-level experts on the formation of VSLAs, financial management, and income generating activities. The project's staff members integrated hygiene and sanitation training into the VSLA TOT training. After this training, the project provided a refresher training to existing VSLA group members at the kebele level from June 11-July 1, 2022, in four rounds. A total of 1,959 VSLA members (97.3% of the members) attended the three days refresher training on IGA. The refresher training mainly focused on identifying possible IGAs in the members' locality, engaging in additional IGAs, managing IGAs (utilization of profit gains, prioritizing expenses) and on raising awareness on hygiene and sanitation. After the training, 322 of the members built ventilated improved latrines and utilized them properly.

Figure 10: TOT training for government staff members

Figure 11: Refresher training to existing VSLA group members

Activity 2.1.1.3 Provide saving boxes, manual, plates and saving book to self-initiated groups

The project's staff conducted assessments of the VSLA groups' functionality, to identify gaps. All the groups were functional at the time of the assessment and 83 VSLA groups reported having a saving box, registration books and plates. IWRA provided saving boxes, plates, and registration books to 50 self-initiated groups by June 2022.

Activity cluster 2.1.2 - New intervention kebeles

Activity 2.1.2.1 Support to government /WoWYC/ to establish 100 VSLA groups

The project provided TOT trainings to 28 (5 women) woreda government staff members for the latter to technically support VSLA members with supervision and monitoring. After the training, the government staff members established 100 new VSLA groups with a total member count of 2,364 women. The groups are established based on the interest of the community members and they selected their 500 management committee members democratically with the presence of all VSLA members. The established VSLA groups started saving within five days of their founding date. Furthermore, the VSLA groups will participate in a training on financial management and IGAs next quarter.

Activity 2.1.2.2. Government supported to train 2,500 VSLA members (including youth and people with disabilities) on inclusive business skill, saving, and life skills)

Government officials provided a training on inclusive business skills, savings management, and life skills to 1,250 VSLA members.

Activity 2.1.2.4 Provide saving boxes, manual, plates and saving book to new VSLA groups

The project distributed saving boxes, plates, and registration books to 100 newly established VSLA group members.

Output 2.2: Enhanced ability of power holders and marginalized groups to challenge existing discriminatory social norms and expand the role of women and girls

Activity Cluster 2.2.2: New Intervention Kebeles

Activity 2.2.2.4 Build the capacity of 6 female university graduates through internship support

IWRA recruited 6 female graduates under the internship program. 5 of them support the project at the implementation sites. The remaining one left the project for a permanent employment opportunity – a replacement for her is planned.

Output 3.2: Increased involvement of the private sector in water, sanitation, and the environment sector together with increased engagement of local government and communities with the private sector

Activity 3.2.1.2: Review feedback on energy saving stove production during SWEEP, and provide adapted refresher training to 90 women producers

To increase the involvement of private sectors in the WASH and environmental protection sector, the SWEEP project established energy-saving stove producer and sale agent groups and special groups distributing water filtration kits. Unfortunately, most of these established groups are not functioning very well due to their limited skills on market promotion to the wider community and the increasing cost of raw materials to produce energy-saving stoves. The general inflation further decreased community interest in these activities and the free handout of energy-saving stoves by other organizations (SLA) decreased their demand.

IWRA further assessed the functionality of established energy-saving stove groups, and evaluated the challenges they face and opportunities they see. Based on the assessment, all groups (12 groups with, in total) were functional and interested to continue working on the production of energy-saving stoves. IWRA plans to discuss these different challenges with the woreda steering committee to decide how best to support them.

Activity 3.2.1.3: Support 13 people with disabilities with their business in household water filtration kits (30 units per individual)

210 water filtration kits were purchased by the project and will be provided to the established businesses led by people with disabilities, that will then provide them to the community. The project will further purchase spare parts like candle filters needed for the maintenance of the existing water filtration kits and provide them to business owners who sell spare parts.

4. Project assessments conducted

4.1. Water Sources Site Assessment and Inventory

Implemented under "Activity 1.1.2.2: Support gov/local community to conduct WASH site assessment, feasibility study & design work".

4.1.1. Findings

a. New water sources site assessment

Based on the communities' responses (willingness of community to contribute in kind and cash, discussion of existing problems on access to water supply, number of beneficiaries) and on the technical field evaluation of the potential of source areas (discharge for spring development, topography, geological formation, vegetation pattern, quality and quantity of existing sources, access and involvement of the community, overall sanitary conditions and environmental impact of construction), 60 sites for new water schemes were selected for construction by the project (30 in East and 30 in West Belesa). All the new schemes in West

Belesa are hand-dug wells, whereas in East Belesa, 10 of them are springs and 20 of them are hand-dug wells.

b. Rehabilitation of existing water supply

Based on the extent of the damage and the material requirements identified by the project staff in collaboration with government staff members, 80 water schemes were identified for rehabilitation (40 in West Belesa, 40 in East Belesa). All the scheme types were hand-dug wells in the case of West Belesa and 15 of them were spot spring developments in the case of East Belesa.

c. Upgrading and expansion of the systems

After discussions held with the woreda steering committee and the technical committee, 3 sites were identified for upgrading of the systems from diesel-power-based to solar-powered systems. Two schemes were selected in East Belesa, and one was selected in West Belesa for an upgrade.

4.1.2. Conclusions

Through this participatory water sources site assessment, a total of 146 schemes were identified for rehabilitation (80), upgrading (3 schemes), expansion of the systems (3 schemes), and new construction (60) in the period of 2022-23. The construction, expansion and rehabilitation work will take place in the coming dry seasons starting from November 2022. The work to upgrade the three solar systems was already completed. A lack of industrial construction material, particularly of cement, caused delay in the construction of new schemes, and the rehabilitation and expansion of existing ones.

For both new and rehabilitated water schemes, the construction should be executed considering the recommendations of the environmental impact assessment regarding soil type, geology, slope, land usage and sanitary condition of the sites. Additionally, during the implementation phase, the community will be involved by contributing resources, both in cash and in-kind.

4.1.3. Recommendations the IWRA project will consider

During the rehabilitation and construction of schemes, the following points will be considered critically:

- Implementation of mitigation measures based on the environmental impact assessment result;
- Full community participation and management;
- Stringent quality monitoring by the community, government, and project staff;
- Completion of all construction work until March 2023;
- Ensure management capacity of the users is developed.

4.2. VSLA Assessment

4.2.1. Findings

1) Status of SWEEP established groups

A total of 101 groups were established by the SWEEP project (51 in West Belesa and 50 in East Belesa). One year after the project ended, all 51 groups were still functional and proceeded to save and provide loans in West Belesa woreda, and 48 groups were functional in East Belesa. However, two groups (Enbeltsig group from Dengora and Alem Addis group from Woyiba kebele) stopped their savings and were unwilling to continue, due to an internal conflict of interest and their limited capacity for conflict management. Nonetheless, the assessment showed that 98% of the established groups were actively engaged in saving, loaning, and in pursuing income-generating activities.

2) Status of self-replicated VSLA groups

A total of 133 self-initiated VSLA groups were established (62 in West Belesa and 71 in East Belesa). After the one year period following the SWEEP project's phase-out, 51 groups in West Belesa and 54 groups in East Belesa, 78.9% of the self-initiated groups, were functional during the rapid assessment conducted during the inception phase. The VSLA groups established in West Belesa (82.2%) were more functional than the groups established in East Belesa woreda (76%). This difference may be due to the different level of support they received from government bodies and due to the members' understanding and composition as well as the security situation, which was much worse in East Belesa.

Based on the respondents' answers we understand that the better performance of project-supported VSLA groups is due to the frequent capacity building trainings and facilitation support, which self-initiated groups did not receive. Just like project-supported VSLA groups, self-replicated groups also continued their regular contribution of savings and covered their members' share when a member was unable to pay their regular contribution. Helping each other strengthened their social bonds.

3) Regularity of individuals attending meetings and savings

One of the important parts of the VSLAs is that they provide an entry point for the economic and social empowerment of the community by engaging in discussions that are relevant to the group, and by developing a savings culture and enabling access to credit to engage in income-generating activities. Reflections contribute to strong social relationships among the members. Regular attendance and participation in the discussions and saving regularly are important elements for the sustainability of the VSLA groups. All respondents of the assessment said that the members attended the meetings and saved regularly, even without the presence of village agent facilitators. Factors that contributed to their regular and active

involvement include: i) shared interest in saving, ii) opportunity to discuss community relevant issues together, iii) and participation in capacity development trainings.

4) Functionality of bylaws

Each group member is involved in the establishment of bylaws. During the FGD, the VSLA members responded that groups established by bylaws are fully functional. However, some of the group members explained that the revision of the bylaws would be important to deal with new challenges (financial management and social funding) that are not covered by the existing bylaws.

5) Management committee roles and responsibility practices

For the proper management of the groups, 5 members were selected to form the management committee. In SWEEP-VSLAs, all management committee members were trained for an additional 5 days. However, among the self-initiated groups, the woreda experts only gave a half-day orientation session to the management committee members. The latter did not feel as well prepared to deal with issues the VSLA groups were facing as the members of the SWEEP VSLAs. The focus group discussions revealed that a few management committee members were replaced by others due to migration or them leaving the village for marriage, divorce, and other personal business. They were replaced based on the choice of all members. Some VSLA group members also rejected management committee members if they did not properly manage the groups.

6) Operation of the loan disbursement and repayment methods

Based on their bylaws, all the groups are governed by a chairperson. The chairperson registers those who are interested in accessing a loan and disburses the loan. Members are granted a maximum of three months for the final repayment of their loan and all members repay their loan with interest (maximum of 10%). The FGD respondents said that most members understood this system, were provided loans based on the rules and regulations, and that most members have taken a loan and repaid it timely.

Few questions were raised in an interview to understand the level of application of the passbooks and the challenges the groups have been facing. The assessment shows that passbooks were maintained safely, and the record-keeper always reported and provided appropriate financial reports at every meeting. Thus, all members are informed on their group's progress. However, in almost all groups the ledger books are old, damaged, and one was destroyed in a fire (the group Hamusit). Therefore, stationary like pens, rulers, and plates will be made available to the groups by the project and government. It is the first time that the government agreed to participate in covering these costs.

Most groups applied conflict resolution methods (for example involving elders during conflictual dialogues), when needed. Among 101 groups, 94 did not face any conflict issues

and 6 reported conflicts among the members and managed them. However, 1 group stopped their savings activities due to a conflict among the group members. In one group in Dengora kebele, East Belesa district, the record keeper was refusing to pay interest and one member refused even to return their loan. The kebele steering committee agreed to solve the issue and expelled both from the group with a subsequent restructuring of the group. This was in agreement with the other members' repeated request to continue their savings and exclude the misbehaving members. Another group in Tala kebele, West Belesa, needed more interventions to solve the existing conflicts (conflict of interest among members, or when members do not pay the penalties). The kebele steering committee usually takes the responsibility to settle these issue in a timely manner.

A case in point for the existing solidarity within some groups is the VSLA in Addisalem kebele, where one member left the group due to her incapacity to pay the biweekly saving amount, and the group members covered her savings for two months until she could rejoin. This indicates how the members support each other.

7) Need for technical support

All the group members during the FGD agreed that they would need a refresher training on market linkages and IGA. They also requested for the project to follow-up with the groups when needed, especially when faced with a challenge in conflict management or the revision of bylaws.

4.2.2. Conclusions

- ✓ Among the SWEEP-supported VSLA groups, 100% and 96% are still functional in West and East Belesa woredas, respectively;
- ✓ Similarly, among the self-initiated VSLA groups, 82.2% and 76% were functional/active in the West and East Belesa woredas, respectively;
- ✓ Generally, 98% of SWEEP-initiated and 79.8% of the self-initiated VSLA groups are fully functional and active;
- ✓ SWEEP VSLA group members attended meetings and saved more regularly without the presence of village agent facilitators compared to self-initiated groups. The provision of VSLA materials (box, passbook), frequent discussions, and the provision of trainings contributed to this achievement;
- ✓ Loan distribution and replacements are applied as agreed by the groups' regulations and all distributed loans are invested only in IGAs;
- ✓ The group bylaws are more functional and applied more by the SWEEP VSLAs than in self-initiated groups;
- ✓ The majority of the disagreements among the members are related to poor/limited skills in conflict management/handling;

- ✓ The assessment proved that if appropriate training and support are provided during the project implementation phase, groups can work sustainably even after the project ended.

4.2.3. Recommendations the IWRA project will consider

- ✓ VSLA members need training on proper IGA identification and conflict management;
- ✓ The self-replicated groups need a detailed VSLA training for both management committees and VSLA members;
- ✓ Woreda government technical teams should support VSLA groups in resolving conflicts;
- ✓ Additionally, material support like saving boxes, plates, registration books, and passbooks should be distributed to self-replicated groups and registration books to project-supported groups;
- ✓ TOT trainings should be provided to new government office experts, for them to cascade the training to new VSLA groups.

4.3. Baseline study

4.3.1. Summary of methodology and findings

The baseline survey was conducted by external consultants from Aba Mella consulting firm, selected on an open-bid competitive basis as per procurement policy. The baseline survey was conducted from May – July 2022. The results will inform project planning and the established baseline values of the project impact/outcome indicators will be used to measure the project's performance and achievements.

A community-based cross-sectional study design with quantitative and qualitative data collection methods/tools was employed. Moreover, a multistage cluster sampling method was employed to select surveyed kebeles, and the survey was conducted in 12 kebeles (6 in each intervention woreda). Primary and secondary quantitative and qualitative data was collected using household (HH) survey questionnaires (982), 20 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), 43 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), observations, and literature reviews.

Main findings:

Food security: the survey revealed that 38% of the households questioned were food insecure for 8 or more months. However, there was a significant difference across woredas, headship, and disability status. According to the baseline result, more than two thirds (78%) of the households in East Belesa, 57% of FHH, and 55% of households headed by a person with disability were food insecure for 8 or more months. According to the food consumption score (FCS), only one third of the surveyed households were within the acceptable range of food

consumption. Households in East Belesa have a lower FSC score compared with West Belesa. Similarly, FHHs have a low FCS score compared to the MHH. According to the baseline findings, there was no difference in FCS score between the SWEEP kebeles and the newly added ones. According to the baseline study result, higher CSI (distress coping) is revealed among female-headed households and households headed by a person with a disability. Households in East Belesa cope with food insecurity with a much higher level of distress coping when compared to households in West Belesa.

IWRA aims to support communities in being more food secure by i) supporting them to diversify their income sources, ii) developing their capacities in managing small businesses that can withstand shocks and generate profits, iii) and by building their capacities in improved irrigation and land management to increase crop yields. The project already plans to support mainly women, and we will increase our reach among FHH and PWD. We will also see if we can negotiate with the government steering committee if we can increase investments made in East Belesa to 60% (at the moment it is 50/50 between West and East Belesa).

Adaptation to Environmental and Economic Shocks: The survey revealed that 40% of the households were exposed to economic shocks during the past year. Households headed by disabled persons, FHH, residents of East Belesa, and those in SWEEP-supported kebeles were disproportionately affected by the economic shocks. The latter have had dire consequences for the communities, setting them back on improvements they had experienced during the SWEEP project. Borrowing from formal and informal sources, selling livestock and buying food items, migrating to urban areas and working as daily laborers, migrating to other localities to find work, taking on public support programs, and collecting and selling firewood and charcoal were the major mechanisms adopted by households to cope with these economic shocks.

Climatic challenges such as lack of adequate and timely rain was the main reason for last year's food shortage. That food shortage forced households to use their seed for food consumption, sell livestock, and borrow from usurers. According to the baseline result, 73% of the households adopted different environmental adaptation strategies[2]. However, the percentage of households who reported having used three or more of the above strategies to adapt to environmental shocks was significantly low among FHH, households headed by a person living with a disability, and residents of the newly selected kebeles.

IWRA planned different interventions to develop the capacity of community members to better adapt to economic and environmental shocks. The political, social and climatic context within which the IWRA project will be implemented will be very challenging – on the one hand

[2] These include - alteration of planting date of crops, crop diversification, inter cropping, reducing number of livestock, utilizing irrigation for adaption of fluctuation of rainfall, growing of early maturing crop, planting trees, using agro-forestry type of production (bee keeping), planting trees around the homestead, soil and water conservation, shift from annual crops (cereals, pulses, and oilseeds) to perennials (mango, avocado, etc.), shifting from free grazing to zero grazing, and forage collection and reserving

confirming the relevance of implementing this project in East and West Belesa. As indicated above, we will increase our reach among FHH and PWD. For the businesses we work with we will develop their capacity on marketing to make their services more visible to the community, and the market assessment will also provide more information as to how we can support them.

HTPs and Gender-based violence: The baseline survey revealed that women and girls are highly vulnerable to and impacted by discriminatory socio-cultural norms. Child marriage is commonly practiced, with 68% of respondents reporting about the practice of early marriage and reporting a husband beating his wife. Men dominating decision-making and physical harassment are also part of commonly practiced harmful traditional practices (HTPs) in the area, with about 22% of respondents reporting low participation of women in decision-making and women's exposure to domestic violence.

Changing social norms that are deeply rooted in the culture of the population in the targeted intervention areas is part of IWRA's objectives. We will involve men and boys, local leaders, and women and girls in the Social Analysis and Action (SAA) process. We will also strengthen synergies between VSLA and SAA groups so that discussions on social norms change can take place in different fora and contexts. Child marriage will be one topic we will encourage the groups to address and act upon.

Access to safe water supply: Regarding access to safe water supply among the surveyed households, the baseline survey revealed that 57% of households have access to safe water supply for domestic and productive use, whereas 43% seek access from unsafe sources (unprotected springs, dams, ponds, rivers, etc). Half of the households (50%) reported that water is always available from their sources; one-third (33%) of them reported that water is available sometimes; while about one-fifth (17%) of the respondents reported that water is not available most of the time. Compared to households in West Belesa where 58% of households reported availability of water from the sources, the availability in East Belesa was significantly low at 40%.

IWRA is well positioned to fill the gaps identified by the baseline survey with regards to access to safe water supply. We will not only increase access to potable water, we will also develop the capacity of government stakeholders and community members on hygiene and sanitation in relation to water usage. We are currently reaching more people in East Belesa than West Belesa with the water schemes, we will negotiate with the project steering committee if we can increase the support even more in East Belesa compared to West Belesa.

Productivity of irrigated land: Chemical fertilizer (inorganic nutrient) has been used by 83% of the households, organic/natural fertilizer (such as compost) was used by 67%, improved seed (35%), herbicides (38%), pesticides (39%) and irrigation (26%). The use of such farming input was significantly lower among households in the newly included kebeles and among households headed by a person with disability. Moreover, the baseline found that the involvement in NRM was significantly lower among FHH, households headed by a PWD, in E. Belesa, and newly added kebeles across all sorts of NRM activities.

IWRA will develop the capacity of government partners and community members on soil and water conservation measures, including the use of organic/natural fertilizers. Here also we aim at involving more FHH and PWD in NRM activities- due to the nature or NRM, which includes a lot of physical work, we will involve FHH and PWD in facilitation and coordination work related to the NRM activities. Finally, we will include the issue of land ownership rights in the SAA manual.

Household chores: The baseline survey revealed that both men and women are engaged in economic activities and spend an average of 8 and 7 hours per day on them, respectively. Women, however, shoulder the major burden of household chores and spend an average of 9 hours per day while men's involvement in household chores is an average of 4 hours; a similar difference is observed between boys and girls.

IWRA already has interventions in place that will contribute to a more equal division of household chores, first by increasing access to water sources that are more easily accessible, second by discussing the division of roles and responsibilities within the household with men and boys during SAA sessions.

Income: The baseline survey revealed that selling crops, domestic animals and animal products as well as labor works are the most common sources of income for an overwhelming majority of respondents. The average net income of households from agricultural products, animal products, and off-farm activities was ETB 15,570. However, this income level varies significantly between FHH and MHH. The average income of FHH is less than half of the figure reported by MHH; households in West Belesa earn an annual income of almost twice the income households in East Belesa earn; and households headed by a person with disability earn lower than the average.

About one-fifth of the households had access to credit. More households in SWEEP-supported kebeles had access to credit compared to the newly included kebeles. Microfinance institutions (such as Amhara Credit and Saving Institution) were the major sources of loans (86%), 9% came from village saving groups and 4% of the households obtained the credit from private lenders. MHH had more access to microfinance institutions than FHH and disabled household heads had a lower access to credit.

FHH and PWD will be involved in VSLA activities and the project will monitor more closely if they are struggling with accessing and managing loans. IWRA will also use the VSLA manual that includes mainstreaming on inclusion that was developed in the SWEEP project.

Female leadership: A higher percentage of MHH (27%) reported that they don't believe in women's leadership qualities compared with FHH (23%). Similarly, a higher proportion of households headed by a person with disability do not trust women's leadership (34%) compared to those headed by an able-bodied person (25%). Unexpectedly, households in SWEEP-supported kebeles had a lower confidence in women's leadership capacity compared with those in the newly added kebeles (32% vs 21%).

The results from the baseline are indeed surprising to the IWRA team. This is an issue we want to look into more in-depth by discussing this further with community members during monitoring visits. We will add that issue as topic in the SAA manual. IWRA will continue to work towards contributing to a more enabling environment for women to be and stay in leadership positions. We will also develop the capacities of female woreda government staff on leadership and negotiation skills, who will cascade what they have learnt to their office colleagues and will talk to women who are in leadership positions in different committees during field visits. CARE also aims at increasing the percentage of women holding leadership positions in mixed committees (WaSHCos for instance) to 40%.

Decision-making: The baseline survey revealed that the role of women in making joint financial decisions on major household expenditures and income is low. Only 50% of women decided jointly with their husband on major household expenditures (i.e. what crops to grow, what farming inputs to use or buy, what crops to take to the market for sale, what livestock production activities to engage in (rearing/fattening/dairy), and what livestock to purchase). A much higher percentage of women (34%) decide jointly on minor household expenditures (expenditure for food and meals and small household utensils). When it comes to decisions on household income, the situation is similar: only 30% of women may decide jointly on major household income activities (decision on what/when to sell crops in bulk and cattle at the market, and what livestock production activities to engage in (rearing/fattening/dairy etc.).

Since the percentage of decision-making power is extremely low when major decisions on income/expenditure have to be made, and given that these are the decisions that will enable women to be more resilient to shocks, CARE will focus on increasing this percentage in particular. We also plan on including this issue in the SAA manual.

Participation in decision-making spaces: Concerning the participation of beneficiaries in formal (kebele, woreda) and informal (Idir, Iqub, committees) decision-making spaces, the baseline survey revealed that the participation is low. Only 54% of respondents participate in decision-making spaces, meaning that more than 56% of respondents are excluded from contributing to processes that have a direct impact on their lives. Moreover, FHH, those in young age (14- 29), people living with disabilities, residents of E. Belesa, and households in the new kebeles were found to have lower levels of participation.

IWRA will create different fora again where participation of beneficiaries will be possible and encouraged. As in parallel we will develop the capacities of women to voice their concerns, and will work on contributing to a more enabling environment, we expect that women will be able to speak up more often and will be listened to. Similarly we will raise awareness on the necessity to listen to the voices of PWD, and will facilitate the participation of PWD in CSC sessions and review meetings. This will lay the foundation for community members to participate more in formal and informal decision-making spaces.

Community requests and service satisfaction: When asked about their level of satisfaction with the available government services, more than half of the households were satisfied with the response of the local government in regard to water and education; over 40% regarding healthcare and electricity; and about one-third of them regarding animal health, agricultural inputs, roads, saving and credit, and social protection programs. However, when it comes to government offices' responsiveness to community requests, communities are less satisfied. FGD participants (especially the youth) said that government responses to community requests have been very weak, almost unresponsive.

IWRA plans to use the Community Scorecard again to improve exchanges between government officials and community members, and build trust between them. The current political context will for sure be more challenging than during SWEEP, and we will keep a close relationship to both parties during the implementation. We will also invite youth representatives to participate in CSC sessions.

4.3.2. Summary of recommendations of the baseline study

The baseline survey results confirm that the project design and the proposed interventions are highly relevant to the communities and in line with the priority needs and the government's strategic directions. To achieve the intended results of the project and to maximize the impact among the target communities, the following recommendations have been taken into consideration.

Recommendations defined in the Baseline survey *(Recommendation made by consultants)*	**Answer by Project Team**
Some of the project targets of the SWEEP project have shown reversal of the changes that were previously attained. These includes: food security for eight or more months in a year, access to safe water supply, prevalence of child marriage, net income, attitude towards women's leadership role, and participation in formal and informal decision-making spaces. It is believed that the war in the northern regions during the past couple of years, weakening the performance of government offices, is a contributing factor. Unlike what was anticipated at the designing stage of the project, it is recommended that IWRA project to use findings of this baseline assessment than referring to	✓ We also assume that many indicator values have worsened over time due to the conflict in Ethiopia and the increasing inflation and prices in general. Some of our assessments provide some additional information why certain groups and individuals have been struggling to continue their activities when SWEEP ended. To accommodate these contextual changes we will reduce some of the indicator targets of IWRA. Moreover, instead of using the values of the SWEEP project as baseline for the SWEEP intervention kebeles, we will use the values of the IWRA baseline.

endline study results of SWEEP project due to above mentioned reasons.	
Material non material component of the development intervention merit equal attention. In this regard, child marriage is the most prevalent and damaging practice that needs serious attention. High prevalence of child marriage impacts a community's social and economic development and leads ty to an intergenerational cycle of poverty. The project needs to take a special focus in addressing child marriage in collaboration with relevant government stakeholders and community organizations.	✓ Child Marriages will be addressed in the SAA & VSLA group discussions
Because more than a third of households are headed by a woman and one in ten of the household heads are persons with disabilities, and the fact that nearly all the baseline indicators show FHH and households headed by persons with disability were prone to all forms of vulnerabilities, requires the focus of the implementation strategies of the project.	✓ The IWRA project will aim at reaching more FHH and PWD (as indicated above) – we decided that at least 10% of direct beneficiaries should be FHH and PWD.

5. WAY FORWARD

CARE will gradually integrate additional elements into the IWRA activities and design and will make sure that it collects the missing information and data it needs to address the needs of beneficiaries.

Below listed are the major activities to be accomplished, among others, during the next quarter:

- Conduct assessment of government (BOWIE1, BOH, BOA) capacity and the priority needs for system strengthening around WASH, water and environmental management and provide support accordingly;
- Conduct assessment to draw up a strategy for how the government can support WASH, irrigation, and watershed committees long-term;
- Support government to strengthen the capacity of groups and WASH associations, likewise for irrigation and watershed committees;
- Support government's facilitation role in application of SDG facility sustainability checklist;
- Support for HDW/SSD rehabilitation activities at selected kebeles and schemes;
- Support government in providing DRR and climate change adaptation trainings for 30 Development Agents (DAs);
- Work with government to conduct Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (CVCA);
- Rehabilitation of shallow/hand dug wells at selected schemes.

Annexes

1. Logframe
2. Activity Timeline
3. Baseline Report
4. Water sources site assessment report
5. VSLA Assessment Report